

## Miami and the US election: Little Havana loses its grip on Washington



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The influence of Cuban-American voters in South Florida is waning. Their former power in Washington is crumbling. What does this mean for the future?

From the early 1980s until President Barack Obama's announcement on December 17, 2014, that he wanted to normalize relations between the U.S. and Cuba, Cuban-American voters in South Florida had a de facto veto over U.S. policy toward Cuba.

### **Change in Florida**

The well-organized and well-funded Cuba lobby was able to mobilize a significant bloc of voters in a strategically important swing state: voters who would cast their vote for or against a candidate based on his or her stance on Cuba.

The presidential candidates of both parties felt compelled to seek their support - or at least avoid alienating them. However, that influence is waning.

Last week, Florida International University's Cuba Research Center released the fifteenth edition of its surveys of Cuban Americans in South Florida, which provide valuable insight into the evolution of the community's views over time.

The results largely confirm the findings of the last FIU surveys. "There were no surprises," co-author Guillermo Grenier said in presenting the results.

The majority of Cuban-American voters in South Florida are Republican voters, outnumbering registered Democrats by a three-to-one ratio, with the gap widening since

2022. 59 percent describe themselves as conservative, while only 25 percent describe themselves as liberal.

There are differences in attitudes based on respondents' age, when they came to the United States, or when they were born there, but not as much as in previous FIU surveys.

From 1991 through 2016, the polls told a consistent story. The community's deeply entrenched anti-communist attitudes and vehement opposition to any American contact with Cuba gradually weakened.

As the generation of political refugees who left Cuba in the 1960s when Fidel Castro declared the revolution to be socialist gave way to a younger generation of immigrants and U.S.-born citizens of Cuban descent, the polls showed a steady rise in support for selling food and medicine to Cuba, for travel and remittances to families on the island, and even for lifting the embargo.

Even the Cuban American National Foundation, the group that most strongly advocated for a tough U.S. policy, moderated its stance in favor of a U.S. policy that encouraged family ties across the Florida Straits.

President Barack Obama recognized these changes and based his initial Cuba policy on family ties, lifting all restrictions on family travel and remittances. When he and Raúl Castro announced the resumption of diplomatic relations, Obama could count on the support of half of the Cuban-American community.

### **Trump's policy of “maximum pressure”**

But then history took an unexpected turn. Donald Trump managed to revitalize the Cuban-American right by promising to overthrow the Cuban government for good. He pursued a policy of “maximum pressure” and imposed the toughest economic sanctions since the embargo began.

The first signs of change in the Cuban-American community emerged in the 2018 FIU poll, which for the first time reported some retreat from rapprochement, with support for ending the embargo falling below 50 percent.

The percentage of Cuban-American voters registered with Democrats also declined, and in the 2018 midterm elections, Cuban-American voters favored Republican candidates for governor, the Senate and the House of Representatives by 70 percent to 30 percent.

However, this Republican landslide victory could not be entirely attributed to Trump's Cuba policy. In a list of ten important issues mentioned in the FIU poll, Cuba ranked last. The most important issues were the economy, healthcare and gun control.

The 2020 and 2022 FIU surveys confirmed what the 2018 survey had predicted. Support for the embargo rose to over 60 percent, but Cuba still ranked only fourth among the most important issues.

Both polls showed that support for Trump and dislike for Biden in the Cuban-American community were not limited to specific issues, but spanned the political spectrum.

In the 2020 poll, approval of Trump's handling of various domestic and foreign policy issues was never below 62 percent. In 2022, Biden's approval rating on similar issues never exceeded 38 percent. Remarkably, 72 percent of respondents disapproved of Biden's Cuba policy, even though it was not significantly different from Trump's.

An analysis by William M. LeoGrande. From 30. Oktober 2024 [Telepolis](#), reprinted in [Cubaheute](#).